

THE HOME GARDEN IN AUGUST

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AS August is regarded by the average home gardener as the first month of the new gardening year, there is a tendency to sow immediately all types of hardy vegetables regardless of ground conditions. There should be no great urgency for extensive sowing of seed merely because the new gardening year has started. Sowing should be governed by the state of the ground and climatic conditions.

IT is not advisable to sow unless the soil can be worked down to a fine, friable tilth; soil is usually in the right condition if it does not stick to the soles of the boots when walked on. In the well-planned garden of adequate size a considerable area of ground should have been dug or trenched in the autumn or early winter and left rough, and the first thing to be done before sowing in spring is to fork over the top spit and break it down thoroughly. This forking provides a good opportunity for digging in lime or artificial fertiliser; the organic manures such as stable or farmyard manures are best deeply dug into the ground in the late autumn or early winter. Light soils require only a shallow forking, as they break down well and readily crumble to a fine tilth if they are in condition for sowing. Heavy soils are thoroughly loosened and aerated best by breaking the sods with the back of the fork, and the operator should work backward so that he does not walk on the loosened soil.

Firming

Firming requires a good deal of judgment. Soils that are heavy or only just dry enough require care to ensure they are not firmed too much; hitting the earth with the back of the spade is sometimes sufficient, but soil that is in the best condition for sowing should be firmed by walking over it with a shuffling motion. Merely walking across the plot is not advisable because usually the soil is then made too firm. It is important to remember that the object of firming is to pack, not consolidate, the soil particles.

Raking

The final work required to be done on the seed-bed is the removal of loose stones and rubbish and reducing the surface of the soil to the finest, level tilth possible. This is done with the fine-toothed garden rake, the teeth of which should penetrate only to the actual depth the seed is to be sown. Heavy soils must be closely observed and sowing delayed if the soil is at all sticky and the correct tilth cannot be easily obtained.

Seed Drills

Probably the most convenient tool for making the seed drills is the ordinary swan-necked hoe. In drawing a drill with the hoe the blade should be tilted on its edge and only the corner used. By using short, frequently-repeated strokes the drill can be drawn straighter and its depth more carefully regulated than if long continuous strokes are used. The maintenance of correct, even depth is very important because variations are likely to cause irregularity of germination which will result in difficulty of thinning or blank spaces in the rows.

Marking the Rows

There are various ways of marking the rows. Some home gardeners use on each end of their garden line a peg or stick about 2ft. long and marked at 6in. intervals. This method is quite good, but a 6 to 10ft. length of $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. x 1in. or $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. x $\frac{3}{4}$ in. batten marked at 6in. intervals and having each foot number painted will be

found very useful both for marking off the distance between the rows and the distance between the plants in the row.

Seed Sowing

The depth of seed sowing usually shown on the seed packet is given more as a guide than a rigid direction. To germinate and grow, seed requires certain soil conditions—favourable temperature and the correct amounts of moisture and air content. Mechanically the soil must not be so loose that the radicle, or young root, finds itself in an air pocket on emergence, nor so compacted (nor the seed planted so deeply) that the young growing shoot cannot force its way to the surface of the ground. If seed is planted too shallow, the soil may dry out and the tender growth suffer injury or die off. Small seed requires only a shallow drill, and as long as a continued supply of moisture is ensured the covering need be only enough to hide the seed from view. Seed like beet and parsnip can be covered by about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. of soil, peas by about 2in., and large seed like beans by 2 to 3in. It is usually a good plan to make the drill a little deeper than required and not fill it completely. This serves to mark the seed drills and for such crops as peas and beans is more convenient for later earthing up.

Seed marketed by reputable seedsmen almost invariably has a high germinating capacity and should be



Fig. 1—In the preparation of a seed-box coarse soil is placed at the bottom of the box to permit drainage and finely-sieved soil is used at the top for seed sowing.